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**Winning My Battle With Anxiety**

**By Ellen M. DuBois**

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Winning My Battle With Anxiety

I was very outgoing as a child. I'd put on plays in front of my parents, sing to records and put on shows. I was like that all through both elementary school and high school. Nothing scared me and my aspirations were high.

I began college as a Theater major and switched midstream to a Communications major. I pictured myself as the next big 'News Anchor'. I'd even auditioned at the Connecticut School of Broadcasting, impromptu, and got accepted.

At the age of twenty, during my sophomore year in college, I lost most of the sight in my left eye. To say I was frightened is an understatement. I was terrified. But, I handled it like a trooper, even on those nights when I was alone in the hospital not knowing what was wrong with me. When family visited, I appeared strong. At night, I cried alone.

Shortly after I got out of the hospital I went to see a stage production of "Fiddler on the Roof". I remember it well because that was the first of many, many terrifying experiences. It was when I had my first anxiety attack.

During the show, my heart began racing so fast I thought I was dying. My chest constricted and I couldn't get enough air. I hyper-ventilated. The more I panicked, the worse it got. I ran up the aisle of the theater and headed straight for the phone. I needed to talk to my parents. I didn't know why, but their voices were what I needed to hear. I thought I was going crazy.

Immediately, my doctor was contacted to see if any of the medications I was given for my detached retina were the cause. The answer was no. I was told to go home and lay down.

The subject wasn't brought up again, but I suffered the attacks in agonizing silence.

## Winning My Battle With Anxiety

About seven months after my loss of site, I was out with my fiancé, (at the time). Suddenly, I couldn't see with BOTH eyes open. My heart began to race again as we rushed to the hospital. By the time we arrived, my verbal and motor skills were gone and the entire left side of my body was numb. You could have cut off my left arm and I wouldn't have felt it. I was screaming inside but when the nurse asked me to describe what I was feeling, all I could get out was, "Bah, Ah." I couldn't form any words, (although I knew what I wanted to say), and I thought for certain that either I was having a stroke or was going to die of a brain tumor.

Well, fortunately, I was diagnosed with what's called a "classic migraine", which impairs verbal and motor skills. I regained those in about twenty minutes and then I got the worst headache I'd ever had in my life. The doctor said it was stress induced. It hasn't happened since, thank God.

And that was that.

As time went by my attacks came in cycles. They subsided for some time while in college, but shortly after I got married they seemed to come "out of the blue". Not often, but each time they were frightening. I didn't know then what I know now, and as I reflect back, I can see where I literally talked myself into a worse frenzy.

I didn't have the courage to seek any help. I thought this was something I just had to live with. I'd been examined by doctors for my eye and for the classic migraine and all of the test results said I was just fine.

So, I went on with my life.

At 25 I suffered a miscarriage. The baby didn't abort itself, it died in my womb and the doctors had to remove it. I was sixteen weeks pregnant at the time. When I got home from the hospital, I wanted to grieve, but my husband, (at the time), and I were on different wavelengths. He thought I should get on with it and over it, and I just couldn't let go of my loss or my grief. That's when my anxiety attacks came back with a vengeance. I had heart palpitations that were so frightening I thought I'd have a heart attack. I worked for a ski area and commuted to New Hampshire, many times driving several hours alone, on weekends and suffered some horrific anxiety attacks while driving. He, (my ex-husband), didn't really understand what was going on with me or sympathize very much. I can't blame him for not understanding it, but it didn't make it easier.

I kept it inside. And it festered.

At the age of twenty seven my husband and I split up. My anxiety attacks grew worse and worse until it almost got to the point where I couldn't function. But, I forced myself to. I went to work, I drove even when my hands were so numb I couldn't feel them, and I talked to people when inside it took every ounce of strength I had to appear "normal". It was exhausting.

I was petrified. I couldn't eat alone for fear I'd choke. I couldn't eat in restaurants for fear of embarrassment. I'd stare at a plate of food and literally be starving — unable to get it down.

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The advent of my divorce really was the catalyst to my first encounter with professional help. What originally was to be marriage counseling turned out to be individual talk therapy. I knew my marriage was over, but the anxiety needed to be dealt with and this proved to be the beginning of my journey.

Adjusting after the divorce along with dealing with my anxiety attacks was quite challenging. It was very multi-layered. I found that talk therapy helped. Not just with the divorce, but with the anxiety.

The talk therapy ended after about a year and a half when my therapist moved to another state. However, the knowledge and insight I gained was invaluable and put me on the path to recovery.

In the years that passed, I had my bouts with anxiety. I did extensive research on the subject and read countless self help books. I was always reaching for more answers; for more assurance. As a result, I knew better how to deal with the attacks. The negative self talk and the fear of loss of control diminished as I developed the ability to handle the attacks with my mind by gently talking my way through them.

They didn't completely go away, however.

In 1996 I met my fiancé. One of the biggest challenges he helped me to meet, unknowingly, was facing my anxiety. He is a pilot and on one of our very first dates, he surprised me with a trip to the airport to take his plane for a flight.

As my heart raced madly, (for I'd never been on a smaller plane), I decided to face my fear. That flight was one of the most beautiful things I've ever experienced. Had I succumbed to my fear, I would never have seen the beautiful moon and stars on that clear and magical night. That taught me a wonderful lesson. I was stronger than my anxiety. I just needed to draw upon my strength.

In 1997 I went to a new primary doctor for severe intestinal pain. Upon examination, she told me that I had a stomach condition caused by Chronic Anxiety Disorder. She had only a brief idea of my history. But, after several questions, etc., she wisely came to her diagnosis. It was then that I began some more talk therapy, on her advise, and started taking a small amount of medicine, called Klonopin, to relieve some of the symptoms of anxiety.

In 1997 I became the lead singer of a wedding band. During my audition my anxiety got so bad that I could feel my knees knocking and my lips were tingling! Try singing like that! But, somehow I made it through and got in. There was more than one "gig" where I'd feel my hands and mouth get "tingly" and my legs would begin to buckle. But, I went on and made myself do it. I think that it pushed me further into discovering my own inner strength. If I could handle an anxiety attack in front of three hundred people, (and believe me, it wasn't easy as I clung to the microphone stand to hold me up), then I could conquer this!

In the years that have passed, I have continued my research on anxiety. I still read many books dealing with the subject and put into practice many of the psychological things that help keep anxiety attacks at bay and/or under control.

I no longer use talk therapy, but what I learned in the process will stay with me forever.

It's not a battle that's won overnight, although the disorder seems to appear overnight. The road is long, and there are many ways to effectively treat anxiety. I think the most important things in helping a sufferer of anxiety are the support of those who love you, understanding the disorder, the faith that you will overcome it and the knowledge that you are not alone in your struggle.

Believe me, you are not.

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Ellen M. DuBois, MA – Ms. DuBois is engaged and has a dog who loves to critique her work. She is published in vol.2 of God Allows U-Turns with her piece, "The Angel in the Dumpster". She writes to touch the hearts of others. Please visit Writings of the Heart, her award winning writer's resource site–<http://writingsoftheheart.homestead.com/index.html>

### **Is It Stress Or An Anxiety Attack?**

**By John H. Rogers**

Stress can lead to a host of problems and manifest itself in many ways. One of the more predominant results of stress is an anxiety attack. An anxiety attack can happen at any time to those who suffer from this disorder. Some studies have pointed to a steady increase of people who suffer from anxiety attacks and other stress related disorders.

Time Magazine printed an article that referred to the cause of anxiety attacks, which is stress, as an epidemic in 1983. No one would argue against the fact that the world around us has gotten to be a more stressful place, and that can only mean that the number of anxiety attacks will continue to increase.

In today's world, no one is immune from the ill effects of stress, whether it is in the form of depression, agoraphobia or anxiety attacks. Many of us have experience an anxiety attack and never knew it for what it actually was. That's because few people know the symptoms of an anxiety attack. Those who suffer from repeated anxiety attacks learn to know the symptoms, and when the onset of an attack is on its way.

A true anxiety attack is much more intense than just feeling stressed out at the end of the day. An anxiety attack can come on suddenly at any time, not just after a single stressful event. Often, the attack overwhelms the individual in one instant, and for no apparent cause. It is estimated that one out of three Americans will experience an anxiety attack, and one out of every seventy five people worldwide will experience an anxiety attack at least once within their lifetime.

How do you know if you're suffering from an anxiety attack? Well, the symptoms are varied, but they can be very intense, so it is easily distinguished from the regular stressed out feeling we have at the end of the day. If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms, you could be having an anxiety attack, and should see a doctor right away.

Extreme nervousness with shaking.

Difficulty breathing, feeling as though you cannot get enough air.

Runaway heartbeat.

For more information about anxiety attack, click the link to visit our website at

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